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Billy Was Told By President Of Libya Cables

Messages Dealt With Libya Visit

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President Carter discussed classified State Department cables from Libya with his brother but "does not now recall" whether he showed or gave copies of the cables to Billy Carter, the White House said yesterday.

White House press spokesman Ray Jenkins said the president does not even recollect whether he actually saw the State Department cables or whether he had heard about them from others. But Jenkins insisted that the cables, which he said were U.S. Embassy reports on Billy Carter's first trip to Libya in 1978, were of a "low classification."

Billy Carter, who recently was forced to register as a Libyan agent, told Justice Department investigators earlier this year that the president gave him State Department cables concerning his trips to Libya and that he kept the cables in his home in Buena Vista, Ga.

The disclosure, contained in FBI reports provided to the House Judiciary and Foreign Affairs committees, created a furor on Capitol Hill.

"For him to have them in his house, and here he's an agent for the Libyan government, I wouldn't be surprised if he gave them to the Libyans," said an indignant Rep. Harold Sawyer, R-Mich.

The House Judiciary Committee immediately demanded a formal explanation from the president as it approved a resolution of inquiry into Billy Carter's activities.

The latest revelation in the Billy Carter-Libya affair clearly rocked the Carter White House.

Press Secretary Jody Powell was nowhere to be found. Jenkins said that Powell, the president's closest White House confidant now that Hamilton Jordan has joined the reelection campaign, was exhausted from the continuing ordeal and took the day off.

Within the White House, Atlanta lawyer Charles Kirbo, the administration's senior outside guru, and former White House counsel Robert Lipshutz worked with the president's staff to help contain the mushrooming controversy and to prepare a report to be submitted early next week to the special Senate committee investigating the affair.

Senior presidential advisers expressed concern over what one described as "hemorrhaging" caused by the daily revelations of some new twist in Billy Carter's Libyan episode. "Hell, that's what it is," said a member of the president's senior staff.

"The worst of it is that we are powerless to control it," said another White House official. "Every day we are told there will be nothing more embarrassing, and every day there is."

The White House issued a short, carefully worded statement late yesterday afternoon, several hours after congressmen said they had seen an FBI report in which Billy Carter claimed the president had given him State Department cables.

"The president's best recollection is that the only State Department cables he has ever discussed with Billy Carter are low-classification cables from our embassy in Libya reporting on Billy Carter's first trip to Libya in September 1978 and indicating that the trip had gone well from the embassy's point of view," Jenkins said.

"The president does not now recall whether he saw the texts of these cables himself or heard about them from others."

"He does not now recall showing the texts to Billy Carter or giving him copies," Jenkins said.

Asked how the White House could be certain that the cables were of a "low classification" if it was unclear what cables the president saw or heard of, Jenkins replied: "We know that all of the classifications, of whatever cables he may have seen, that none of them were above low classification."

Jenkins defined low classification as documents stamped "confidential" or "limited official use," the two lowest security designations.

Jenkins said the president does not remember precisely when he discussed the classified cables with his brother, except that it was "sometime after" Billy Carter's September 1978 trip to Libya. Both the Justice Department and Billy Carter listed that trip as one of the president's brother's activities as a Libyan agent.

ting on a coffee table in the hotel room. "They are CIA cables. I've got them," Lisker quoted Billy Carter as saying.

When Lisker told the president's brother they were State Department cables, he replied, "Same thing."

"Who gave them to you?" Lisker asked.

"Jimmy," Billy Carter replied, according to Lisker.

Lisker said the Justice Department is investigating the question of who gave Billy Carter the cables and whether he has them at his Georgia home. "We will have to follow up with the president," Lisker said.

State Department officials said cable traffic on Billy Carter's Libya trip consisted of six to eight messages, some of which were classified with the lowest security headings. The president has the authority to declassify any cable, an official said.

The messages were described as routine. One cable from William L. Eagleton Jr., the senior American diplomat in Tripoli during Billy Carter's first trip, reported that "there has been no negative fallout" and that the visit actually was helpful.

The House resolution of inquiry, approved Tuesday by the Foreign Affairs Committee and yesterday by the Judiciary Committee, is not expected to come before the full House before Aug. 19, after the Democratic National Convention. It was the resolution that prompted the Justice Department to provide the documents containing Billy Carter's interview. The department took back the documents yesterday, despite bipartisan protests.

House members also were up in arms over Friday's revelation that Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti discussed the investigation of Billy Carter with the president, despite repeated assertions to the contrary by Civiletti and the White House.

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